

April 19, 2003

Letters to the Editor:

### CHOICES TO MAKE

A great wave of medical history is being generated by the announced completion of research on the human genome. All of us, as tax payers, are paying for this research and look forward to the time that this basic research will yield ever longer life spans to the biblical 120 years.

At 70 years of age, with three sons' families and eight grandchildren to leave behind, I read with alarm the Post Gazette's title, "What's an older person's life worth?" EPA is saying it's less in drafting new rules.

The real effect of these rules under discussion here today raises serious socio-religious issues.

We have just recently waged a successful war where the values of life are seriously different than our own established in our historical Judeo-Christian perspective. For us in my generation, we were told until now of the inestimable value of each and every life and the value of the wisdom of the generations. We have just defeated a foe whose value system in terms of human life is non-existent when you think of suicide bombers; yet there is at the same time a global university in parenthood, evidenced by the photos so sadly seen of a parent's wailing by the grave or body of a child. Does it matter whether the wailing is done by friend or foe? We still have a universality of parenthood.

Was the president of Metropolitan Life Insurance in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century less valuable when he still came to productive work at the corporation's New York offices at age 99? True, he only worked when he felt like it and only on special projects. As we age as a society, more seniors are continuing on to their second careers and how many will make valuable historical contributions to society?

But before going further forward, let's measure man's current and historical efforts, of any collective civilization's efforts, as well as by each of us as individuals. That measure is the kind of world, the kind of society we turn over to the next generation.

We who are here today can enrich or impoverish that world which we know we will all too soon leave behind. At best our years to contribute as adults to what we will leave

behind is limited. Therefore, it is our children who will measure the value of our thinking and our actions of behalf of causes.

In passing the baton in the race of life's course through ours and future generations, we have the momentary opportunity to meet the greater responsibility in making the world a safer, happier, healthier and more peaceful place to live and seniors can contribute from their life experience because of their seasoned thinking.

Question: What were our parents saying to us as a younger generation?

Answer: Work hard, be frugal, save and try to retire and live a long life (40 to 65 years of the work ethic that built this country).

Question: What are we saying to our children and grandchildren when we say EPA says that our value as we age is "less"?

Answer: Work and play or is it play and work, retire early and live long (75 plus years).

On 4/7/03 at the UPMC sponsored 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Genetics and Genomics, Daniel Wikler, Ph.D., Professor of Ethics and Population Health, Harvard School of Public Health, said that our country has forgotten some of our less desirable history in Eugenics and those same practices were taken to an extreme by so many dictators, Hitler, Stalin and closer to the present, Slobodan Milosevich, Marcos, Saddam Hussein.

Are our moral underpinnings weakening? <sup>devaluation</sup> If our costs for supporting Medicare are too much for our society to bear, perhaps a ~~devaluation~~ makes more sense than to allow ourselves to backslide and perhaps in the final test to become as bad as some of the totalitarian leaders listed.

Therefore, should each EPA official carry and display during these sessions photographs of the children and <sup>1/3</sup> grandchildren to remind themselves that each of us is in the collective sense of our society creating the next wave of our history. We in this great nation know for whom we labor regardless of religious beliefs. So what is the ideal and pragmatic side of this issue? If we stick to our beliefs, we have little choice but to continue to implement and practice those policies that EPA now threatens by saying each of us "old" fogies is worth less or are they saying eventually worthless?

I don't for a moment think they mean worthless and can still look in the mirror and shave or put on makeup. After all, "There but for a few days go I!"

Where's the pragmatic?

We know of our weaknesses in Social Security (social insecurity) funding and we know that Medicare is a radically-growing part of our national budget. Let's not fall into the Eugenics, Kavorkian and willing suicide pitfalls that surround us.

Let's try to look at system weaknesses. How can we strengthen them or change the name and even to a limited degree the intent to cover our Social Insecurity and Medicare issues? Could we, if successful in our thinking, then raise our EPA ~~standards~~ or at least leave them at the level that exists at this writing? *standards*

Suggestion:

If we raise the ante for the costs of entitlements from \$6.00 for an entry-level worker, plus Social Security deductions to 20% of the gross wages (10% to be contributed by the employer and 10% deducted from the employee's gross pay) and make the same investments as long-term care policy sellers now do, including refunding 80% of the premium costs in each 10<sup>th</sup> year, Could we then pay our bills of what we now call Social Security and long-term health care by initiating this new deduction for all entry-level employees and doing away with Medicare and Social Security as we now know it?

Can man as we know him in our current society learn from our recent history (Social Security and Medicare) and allow the checks and balances of our governmental systems to correct our dangerous road into the future (Eugenics)?

From these challenges, a new and better society can emerge and take its responsibility to the grandchildren of future generations.

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